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SELF-TRAINING IN MYSTICISM

A GUIDE TO THE MYSTIC WAY

BY

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TO

MY WIFE,

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FROM HER COMPANIONSHIP,

I DEDICATE THIS

BOOK

Now a practical mysticism, by which I mean the spiritual development possible to the average man . . . shows us innumerable men and women who had the vision; who were aware of an unchanging love and beauty which really transformed their lives, for whom our mysterious universe gradually unfolded like a flower, so that they gazed more and more deeply into its heart. It offers to teach the method of self-conquest and of contemplation by which they remade their consciousness, and redeemed their lives from concentration on the transitory and unreal. It shows us their final state, in which they became fresh centres of creative life, receiving it—as an artist receives æsthetic joy—in order to give again. This, it says, is the way men can cure their spiritual impotence, their uncertain touch on life, and obtain access to the real sources of vitality.

EVELYN UNDERHILL.
(*The Hibbert Journal*, April 1921.)

I found full many a hindrance on the road
That led up to the summit of desire,
Sharp rocks and wounding thorns; and in the mire
I fell, and soiled the garment I had care
To keep so fair
For the great rites awaiting me in Love's abode.
Yet on I pressed,
Dreaming of rest
That should be sweeter for toil undergone
When on my Saviour's breast
Divine and human should be one."

C. M. VERSCHOYLE.
"*Crucifixion on the Mountain.*"

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PREFACE

A FEW words of explanation and apology are needed when a busy parish priest attempts to write a book on mysticism. This book of elementary instructions would never have been written were the author not convinced that many people are, all unconsciously, living the mystical life. Such only need to have their attention drawn to the fact, and their footsteps directed in the way, to pass from a world of conflicting interests and divers experiences to the enjoyment of the mystic union with God Himself. It is here that a few simple experiences of a very ordinary man may help to serve as a warning and an encouragement.

This book is concerned solely with Christian mysticism. The experiences of non-Christian mystics, except in so far as they may be shared by Christians, are entirely omitted from the following pages. This is not to deny their value. They form an exceedingly interesting department of the science of Comparative Religion. But for Christians it is sufficient that they obey their Master's words: "Come unto

ME . . . and I will give you rest." The Christian's pathway to Reality lies through Christ.

Without any doubt this book will run the risk of giving offence by its apparent egotism. But it could hardly be otherwise. Mysticism is an intensely personal affair, and it is impossible to write of it in any other way. For this I would humbly crave pardon from my readers.

Along the pathway of the mystic life there passes a goodly company of the redeemed. Let all those whose feet are already set in the way spare no efforts to draw their brethren to their side that, at the consummation of the ages, the Beatific Vision may be shared by all mankind.

Three of the chapters in this book have already appeared in print: *Beauty* in *The Quest*, and *Meditation* and *Contemplation* in *The Commonwealth*. I beg to acknowledge the kindness of the Editors concerned in allowing me to reprint these chapters. I have also to thank Miss C. M. Verschoyle and her publisher (Mr. S. M. Watkin) for permission to reproduce the beautiful verse which appears on a previous page.

I hope to be able to develop, in a subsequent work, some of the lines of thought suggested in the later chapters of this book.

H. L. Hubbard.

Chapter I

WHAT MYSTICISM IS

THIS little book is intended to deal with the mystical life. At the outset it is necessary to ask—and, if possible, to answer—two questions: What is mysticism? and, How can I live the mystical life? In a sense the answer to the second question depends upon the answer to the first. We will begin with an attempt to define mysticism.

Expressed in its simplest terms, mysticism is the "science of union with God." That is to say, it describes the life of man in such close union with God as to be entirely controlled by the Divine Will. St. Augustine has told us that no one can ever enjoy a sense of rest and peace until he finds it in God. This is a common fact of experience. As we go through life, we are for ever haunted by a sense of failure. Even when everything seems to be going well with us, we are conscious, deep down in our inmost being, that something is lacking. The possession of every good thing the world has to offer is, in itself, no guarantee of happiness. Behind and beyond such good

things as health, material possessions and human love, we are conscious of the existence of some profound mystery, some deep secret. The soul seeks to lay hold upon this secret. The mystic is one who has solved the mystery, who holds in his hands the key of happiness. *He is at one with God.* He is in close and intimate touch with Reality. Such is the mystical life.

The enjoyment of this life is not reserved for a few choice souls. *It is open to all who will respond to its demands.* High and low, rich and poor, one with another can tread the mystic pathway which leads the soul to God. Indeed, the simpler we are, the easier for us is the mystical life. The rich man finds simplicity a hard grace to acquire, the clever man cannot easily subordinate his head to his heart. The ways of God are not those of man, for God always chooses the poor and weak to confound the wise. Let no one say the mystical life is not for him. God's call comes to all alike. All that is needed on the part of man is a heart aflame with love, and a will entirely devoted to God. To the pure in heart, that is to those with a single-minded devotion to the best in life, is the promise made that they shall see God.

Such are the preliminary requirements of a mystic. Clad in the armour of love and wholly consecrated to the service of God, he may set out on his pilgrimage. It is quite impossible to describe with accuracy the whole mystical journey. Each mystic has his own experiences,

his own adventures by the wayside. For all that, there are certain milestones which all must pass, and by which each can measure his progress. Roughly speaking, there are three such stages on the road. The first is the stage of *Purgation*, wherein the soul is purified from the stains of sin and self. To this follows the stage of *Illumination*, in which the soul learns conformity to the pattern of Jesus. The last stage is that of *Union*, when the soul reaches its goal, and from its resting-place in the Heart of God is able to look back over the world it has left behind, there to recognize the essential unity which underlies the apparent contradictions of human life.*

Through each of these stages the soul of the mystic must pass. Some will tarry longer in one stage than another, but no soul can ever wholly leave a lower stage even when it advances to a higher, for Purgation and Illumination may not be neglected even when Union is attained. These three stages are the only things of which it is possible to speak with any certainty in describing the mystical life. That which lies between each stage, and even the experiences undergone at similar points along the mystic path, are not the same for each separate pilgrim.

The remainder of this little book will consist of an attempt to describe in more detail, and as far as it is possible, each of the three stages of

* Walter Hilton: *The Scale of Perfection.* Book iii. Chap. xv.

the mystic pilgrimage. Those who desire to study mysticism from an academic point of view will find nothing to help them in this book. It is meant only for those who really desire to live the mystical life themselves, and is intended to make some practical suggestions to that end.

Chapter II

DISILLUSIONMENT

AT the very outset of the mystical life there is an experience to be undergone. No one would ever leave the comfortable life of the senses, and devote himself to a rigorous cultivation the inner life of the spirit, unless he was first assured that the former could not wholly satisfy his longings and desires. It is only when he has experienced the emptiness of the best that the world has to offer that he will turn away from it and search elsewhere for satisfaction. The experience by which he comes to recognize the emptiness of the world's resources is called *Disillusionment.*

This experience may come to a man from many directions. It may be slowly borne in upon him, or it may flash across his spiritual horizon in a moment. But however it may come, it is an essential preliminary of the mystic life. "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* The mystic is one who has weighed his soul in the balance against the whole world,

* St. Mark viii. 36.

and has found the world to be, in comparison, as negligible as a feather.

Let us think of some of the many ways in which this experience of disillusionment may be realized. A great sorrow may befall us. At once our friends offer us their sympathy. They write to us and come to see us. They speak kind words to us, or, if they are wiser still, they say nothing. It is a very wonderful thing, this human sympathy, and we ought to thank God for it. But those who have had it poured out in richest abundance on their sorrowing hearts know that it is not enough. The aching heart cries out for more. Human sympathy, wonderful as it is, can never heal the wounds of grief.

> "When sorrow swells the laden breast
> And tears of anguish flow,
> One only Heart, a broken Heart,
> Can feel the sinner's woe."

As with sorrow, so with suffering: human sympathy cannot do all. It is an amazing experience to lie on a sick-bed and feel yourself surrounded by all the rich resources of human love. But unless you can see the love of Christ transforming all human ministrations, you will not rest content. He must be there and His Presence realized before the heart of the sufferer will find peace.

Not alone in the darker experiences of life do we discover the hollowness of the outer world. Even when all goes well with us we are often discontented. The pleasure-seeker is by no

means the happiest of men. Often he is the very opposite. For the search of pleasure can never satisfy an immortal soul. It will only create an appetite for more.

Beauty and Art come nearer than anything else in this world to bringing a real joy to the soul of man. Yet by themselves they can never satisfy. Only as the soul learns to look upon them as avenues of approach to an underlying Reality will they play their true part. The loveliest scenes in nature, the most exquisite works of art, are by themselves powerless to satisfy the cravings of the human heart.

In some or all of these ways the soul of man undergoes the experience of disillusionment. How many are there who have learnt the lesson which St. Augustine taught long ago, that God creates the soul of man for Himself, and that true rest can only be found in Him?

Let us go on to consider the effect of this experience of disillusionment on the soul of man. One of three things may happen as a result.

1. Man may go on seeking for satisfaction in the world. He may plunge more deeply into the search for new pleasures and new sensations. He may enter more fully into the life of sheer worldliness. He may turn more and more to the society and sympathy of his fellow-men.

2. The experience of disillusionment may lead to a "don't care" attitude towards life. Since nothing in the world seems to satisfy his cravings,

a man may come to believe that nothing can. He may be led to drown his disappointment, and to feel that nothing matters very much. From such an attitude it is only a very short step to a life of sin.

3. The realization of the emptiness of the world may lead a soul towards the fullness of God. Deep down in the heart of man there is a certainty that somewhere or other there exists the satisfaction of all his desires. His experience has taught him that such satisfaction is not to be found in the world, and so he turns to God. The creature is surrendered that the Creator may be won.

Chapter III

CONVERSION

IN the last chapter we were considering the experience of disillusionment, whereby the spirit becomes aware of the unsatisfying nature of the life of mere worldliness. Man discovers that beyond all that the world has to offer him there is yet a secret, the possession of which alone can bring true peace to his eager and restless spirit. Disillusionment shows him the emptiness of the world, and Divine grace teaches him where alone he may find the satisfaction of his desires.

Disillusionment is an experience of the emotions and the intellect. The work of these latter is to gather experience and collect evidence upon which the will may exercise its power of choice. When the emotions have taught the emptiness of the world, and the intellect has demanded a true satisfaction of its restless questionings; when the grace of God has illuminated the darkness of the human soul and shown God as the real object of all human craving—then the will must decide whether or no it will choose to follow God. The calm,

deliberate choice of God, the determination to do His will alone, is called *Conversion.*

As the process of disillusionment may be instantaneous or protracted, so is it with conversion. Some souls are converted in a moment, as was the case of St. Paul on the Damascus road. Such an experience is rarer than we sometimes imagine. It is not easy for many truly converted people to state a particular moment when the experience came to them. That some can do this no one would deny ; but to expect such an experience to be universal is to set a limitation upon the working of Almighty God. The majority of men are not converted all in a moment. Years of patient adjustment are needed before they can bring their wills into line with the will of God. Many deliberate acts of choice must be made before they can train their wills to act wholly in accordance with the divine will. Such a conversion is no less real than the experience of one who can say : " At such a moment and in such a place I gave myself to God."

One result of the erroneous belief that all genuine conversions must be instantaneous is that many people are truly converted without knowing it. Perhaps it may be so with some who read this little book. Are there any tests which we may apply, and whereby we can measure the genuineness of our conversion ? Most assuredly there are. There are certain fruits of conversion which ought to be apparent

in varying degrees in the lives of all who have undergone, or are undergoing, this experience. The ripeness of the fruit is the measure of the soul's conversion.

As he goes about the world the converted man will be conscious of an entirely new sense of power. He feels he can do, or at any rate attempt, things which before seemed beyond his reach altogether. The explanation of this phenomenon is not difficult. He has, all unconsciously, realized two facts, his own weakness and God's strength; and has, again unconsciously, trained himself to rely more and more upon God. His conversion can be measured by the sense of power which he experiences.

With others, conversion leads to an extraordinary sweetness in the soul, and an unfailing cheerfulness which continues even amid disturbances and in face of disappointments. Here, again, the explanation lies near at hand. He has come to know, though unconsciously, that "God's in His Heaven; all's right with the world."* He tastes "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," because, without knowing it, he has learnt to "stay his mind upon God." He no longer sets store upon external comforts; he is indifferent, more or less, to his surroundings, because he knows, and *feels*, the presence of Jesus in his heart.

Is he making progress in his prayers? Does he find the Sacraments becoming more and

* R. Browning: "Pippa Passes."

more precious to him? That is an almost infallible test of a true conversion. The writer once knew a girl who bid fair to make much progress in the spiritual life. She seemed to possess all the natural and temperamental endowments of a mystic. She loved the beautiful, and sought the good in life. But she could not make the complete offering of her will to God. She sought for beauty rather than its Giver; she was content with creatures rather than the Creator. And the chief symptom of her unconverted life was the neglect of the Sacraments.

Once again, the measure of a man's conversion may be estimated by the progress he is making in the struggle against sin. Does he regard sin with an ever-increasing sense of horror? And conversely, does he realize more and more the wonderful attractiveness of holiness?

In ways such as these, we may test the reality of our conversion. No experience can be truly termed a conversion unless it can show some spiritual fruit. Look into your own life; examine yourself with the help of God's Holy Spirit, and see if you can find any fruit of this kind. Do you feel a new sense of power in your daily life? Are you shedding around your path the sweetness which comes from a sure trust in God? Is your life of prayer and communion becoming more and more precious to you? Are you making, as the years go by, a real advance against the power of sin in your

own life? If you can answer "Yes" to these questions you may be quite certain that your conversion is a real experience.

Above all, conversion brings with it a desire for progress. It unlocks a door through which the soul longs to enter in and take possession of new treasures. Life is growth, and the desire for spiritual growth is the most genuine test of a real spiritual life. With this growth mysticism is concerned. Disillusionment and conversion are the two essential preliminaries of the mystic life. They are like the digging of the ground and the planting of the tree. To them will succeed the training of the young plant that it may bring forth much fruit. Through the stages of the mystic pilgrimage the disillusioned and converted soul will pass until, in union with Divine Love, it will blossom and bear fruit into life eternal.

Chapter IV

MORTIFICATION

DISILLUSIONMENT and conversion are the two experiences which stand at the beginning of the mystic life. Until they have been, in some degree, undergone, the soul cannot enter upon the life of mystic experience. Only the disillusioned and converted can undertake the highest adventures of the spiritual life. Let us suppose that the reader has undergone these two preliminary stages, and is ready to advance along the King's Highway. What is the first stage of his progress ?

The mystic life begins with discipline. The soul that would attain to union with God must be cleansed from all sin. It must be clothed with "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord."* The vision of God is reserved for the pure in heart. The process whereby the soul cleansed and the heart purified is called the Way of Purgation.

Purgation is a two-fold process. There is the continual weaning of the body from the love of the world, which is called *Mortification.*

* Hebrews xii. 14.

There is also the purification of the mind from the desire of aught save God, which is called *Detachment.* In this present chapter we will think only of mortification.

It would seem to be a law of Nature, that life springs out of death. The cycle of the seasons is proof of this. The death of spring ushers in the birth of summer. When autumn dies it is at once succeeded by winter. The tree that would bring forth fruit must first cast off its blossom. Humanity is only able to perpetuate itself by a constant series of lives which come to an end, and so make room for the newly-born. The process of mortification can be observed in nature, and, to a certain extent, its purpose can be understood. Such death as exists in nature is the herald of new life.

So it is in the sphere of grace. A soul practises mortification not for any inherent merit, but rather that so it may advance towards a more perfect growth by such discipline. There is no spiritual value in mortification as such. The discipline of the body is futile, unless it be made the means of the soul's advance. There are many souls who practise a rigid discipline of all the bodily appetites and only succeed in creating a character wholly repellent and entirely loveless. Such people display a strange lack of the most elementary common-sense; for who would give up some pleasure unless it were for the experience of an even greater pleasure? The spiritually-minded man

cannot afford to neglect his common-sense.

Before we go on to consider the means whereby we can practise mortification, let us be quite clear as to our motive. We deny our bodies certain pleasures for the sake of even greater joys which can only come to perfection in our lives as we learn to cast aside the lesser. We mortify our bodies that they may come to fullness of life. With the motive clear in our minds we can go on to consider the means by which we shall practise mortification.

There are three departments of our personality wherein we must exercise a rigid discipline—the body, the mind and the will. The practice of mortification moreover must proceed in that order. At the beginning of the mystic life the seat of the fiercest temptation is the body. Later the enemy, vanquished by the body, will assail the mind. Finally, if he is again defeated, he will concentrate all his endeavours in an attack upon the will. These two latter encounters will probably occur during the later stages of the mystic life. The temptation of the mind is fiercest while the soul is passing through the stage of Illumination, and will often result in doubts and despair. The final stage of Union with God is the occasion of the attack upon the will, and at this point there sometimes descends upon the soul the awful period of gloom which is spoken of as the "Dark Night of the Soul."* These two latter

* *cf.* St. John of the Cross.

attacks will be considered later; at first the energies of the whole life must be directed towards subduing the body to the spirit.

The age-long remedy for a too-assertive body is fasting; and the Christian Church, in her wisdom, has not hesitated from the first to set aside certain days on which some form of abstinence should be practised. It ought to need no words to say how important such a practice is. No true mystic can afford to disregard fast-days, whether appointed by authority or self-imposed. Considered only as an act of obedience, the observance of the former is of untold value. Add to this the spiritual advantage of denying the body the gratification of some of its more inordinate desires, and there is absolutely no excuse for failing to observe certain days for fasting. It is easy enough to assent to the desirability of using these days in the appointed way; it is not always so easy to lay down rules for their proper observance. Indeed, no one can, or ought to, legislate for another in such matters. What is one man's meat is another man's poison. To abstain from flesh-meats may be to some a real act of self-denial; to others it may only entail a welcome change in the daily menu. There is only one real test which will hold universally. Let each look into his own life and mark those bodily appetites which are becoming too insistent in their demands. Then let him, on the fast-days, concentrate upon the denial of those

demands. For some it may only be an over-indulgence in tobacco, or sweets, or a particular kind of food or drink. But whatever it may be, an over-indulgence of the body will destroy the spiritual balance, and dull the keen edge of the interior life. We must not spare the rod in the early stages of the mystic life. We must take it into our own hands and administer it to ourselves.

A word of warning must be given. We must do nothing that may destroy or impair our bodily health. Health is one of the greatest of all God's gifts to us, and is intended to be used in His service. To deny oneself a due portion of sleep or a sufficient amount of nourishment is not only silly, but actually harmful and wicked. If we are in any doubt we should consult a doctor. Only let us be careful to submit our case to one who is himself a practising Christian, and who understands the true purpose of self-denial. Otherwise he may not recognize that the body, from the mystic's point of view, must be the servant, and not the master, of the spirit. For the body is the doctor's primary concern, as the spirit is that of the mystic.

Bodily discipline must not stop short at the mortification of the appetites. The senses need to be carefully watched. Sight, hearing and speech must be controlled, for they are instruments ready to hand for the purposes of sin. The old monastic rules laid great stress on the

manner of guarding the eyes, ears and tongue,* and they were right to do so. The sight of luxury and immodesty will often lead to the sins of covetousness and lust. The hearing of evil will awaken thoughts which had better remain dormant. The sins of the tongue who can number? Only those who have sinned in this way will know the pain of remorse which inevitably follows upon an unkind, untruthful, or unwary word. Verily the tongue "is a little member and boasteth great things."†

Let no one consider mortification too hard to be attempted. Though at the moment it seemeth to be grievous, yet soon it will become sweet. The cross is an ugly thing, but we *can* learn to love it. For we remember One "who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."‡

* Thus in the *Rule of St. Benedict* we find: "Whether he be in the oratory at the Work of God, in the monastery, or in the garden, on a journey or in the fields, or wheresoever he be, sitting, standing or walking, always let him, with head bent and eyes on the ground, bethink himself of his sins." (Chap. vii.) Again, "Because of the importance of silence, let leave to speak be seldom given, even to perfect disciples." (Chap. vi.)

† St. James iii. 5. ‡ Hebrews xii. 2.

Chapter V

DETACHMENT

BESIDES mortification there is another discipline which must be begun during the Stage of Purgation. Sometimes it follows as a result of self-imposed mortifications, but more often it is due to the direct action of Almighty God upon the soul. It is called *Detachment* and consists in the disengaging ("detaching") of the soul from pre-occupation with creatures. Its fruit is a complete indifference to the outward conditions of life.

Everybody has to experience some "thorn in the flesh" during his lifetime. "The corruptible body—and, we may add, the corruptible mind—presseth down the soul."* The difference between a "thorn in the flesh" and an external mortification is that, whereas the latter is self-sought and self-imposed, the former is sent by God for the discipline of the soul. Nevertheless it rests with the soul whether or not the "thorn" may be to its spiritual profit or loss. There are, at least, three attitudes which a soul may adopt towards any disciplinary

* Wisdom ix. 15.

experience which God calls it to undergo. It may resist it to the end; refuse to recognize it as a possible means towards spiritual advancement, and merely regard it as something to be set on one side or fought against. It may submit to it meekly, content to believe that the soul can only lie dormant in the hand of God, to be moulded and guided entirely by Him. This is a better attitude to adopt than that of resistance; but it is not the best. The best attitude is that of active co-operation. When God sends a discipline to the soul, man should seek to co-operate with Him in His purpose. He can best do this by saying, "This is the Will of God for me: therefore I will make it my will for myself." It is in this way that the soul will make a real progress along the pathway of the mystic life.

We may reasonably ask two questions: "What is the kind of discipline which God sends a human soul?" and "What is the result which He most desires to see?" We will devote the remainder of this chapter to a consideration of these two questions.

God always sends such discipline as He sees the individual soul to be most in need of. Just as a surgeon will use different instruments on different patients for different purposes, so will God always adapt His discipline to the individual. Some He calls to a life of suffering. Here, at first sight, is a great mystery. Suffering is a thing abhorrent to the worldly man. Only the

mystic sees its real value, and actually desires it for himself.* Others are called to a life of great responsibility in high places. The life of poverty is another discipline of Almighty God which a mystic alone will welcome as a great prize. Whatever it may be that God sends to a soul in the way of discipline, we may be quite sure that it is just the very thing which that particular soul most requires for its spiritual advancement.

What is the purpose of Almighty God in thus disciplining the human soul? He desires to wean it from love of this passing world. Ill-health ought to teach us that the body is a weak and mortal possession, and that we do wrong to give too much attention to its inordinate desires and cravings. Responsibility ought to teach us that life must not be self-centred, but must express itself in the service of others. Poverty should serve to wean souls from the love of riches and their worldly goods. Even if a soul does not suffer this discipline itself, it must be prepared to learn its lesson from the example of others.

The fruit of a right use of such discipline will be a complete indifference to our surroundings or our conditions of life. What does it really matter if we be prince or peasant, if we live in a castle or a cottage, if we be strong or sickly in our health? These are matters of little or

* Mother Julian prayed that she might have a bodily sickness at the age of thirty, and God granted her desire.

See also Chapter xv below.

no moment when we consider them side by side with our call to serve and follow Jesus along the pathway of the inner life. Let the love and obedience of Almighty God be the sole object of our life, and we shall be relieved of all the worries and anxieties which surround the path of the worldly man.

Chapter VI

READING

THE second stage of the mystic way is that of Illumination, or Discipleship. By the patient endurance of discipline the life is cleansed not only from the habits of sin, but also from inordinate desires for the things of this world. The heart of man becomes a carefully prepared canvas upon which the Divine Artist can paint the picture of Himself. The mystic steps out along the Way of Illumination. He grows day by day after the pattern of Jesus.

The first condition of this growth into the likeness of his Master, is a knowledge of the Divine Pattern as it is reflected in the world of men and things. The mystic must know something of the revelation of God in nature. He must catch the vision of the Divine Life mirrored in the thoughts and lives of his fellow-men. Above all, he must ponder in his heart the wonderful revelation once given to the world in the Incarnate Life of the only-begotten Son of God. From two directions comes this knowledge to the mystic—observation and reading.

The practice of a constant observation of men and affairs is essential to any knowledge of the great purpose of God for the world. Like "Eyes" in the old story, the mystic is one who sees more than "No Eyes" in the life of the world around him. He sees the hand of God at work where his companions see only the common daily round. Every bush, to the mystic, is a-fire with the presence of God. Every passer-by reflects, in some degree, the image of his Maker. Nothing that God has made or cleansed is, in the mystic's eyes, common or unclean. All sentient life is a-throb with the Divine Spirit. Inanimate life is a mirror wherein is reflected the Face of God.

As we go about the world we must keep our eyes and ears open if we would know the Presence of God. We must not expect God to reveal Himself to us if we are not willing, on our side, to watch for Him. Never let us take a walk or enter into a conversation without asking God to give us a vision of Himself.

Side by side with the practice of observation must go that of reading. At all times men have been inspired to write, for our learning, the story of God's dealings with them. Every book is, in a sense, a revelation of God—and the mystic ought to be at pains to become a student. Reading will do at least three things for him. It will quicken his imagination, broaden his outlook, and set him an example of life. Let us think of these three things in turn.

One of the saddest things about adolescence is that it so often means the gradual loss of the imaginative faculty. Nine people out of ten are materialists for this reason alone. As children they possessed a keen imagination. They delighted to live in a dream-world distinct from that of their surface-existence. Their games were what the more ignorant adults called "make-believe." To the child these games are intensely real, more real than any games—even the Game of Life—as played by their elders. The child possesses, in his imagination, a power of entering another region beyond the sense-world of his everyday life. Hence the child is the true mystic. Some, like Peter Pan, never grow up. They never lose the child-like outlook, or the power to find a real world just beyond the world of their daily life. For the majority it is not so. Each year as it passes means the closing of more doorways of the spirit, until at last they come to regard the world of men and affairs as the only reality. The spiritual world has become a vague, unreal dream.

Reading helps the would-be mystic to avoid this. It keeps his imagination keen and alive. The reader can always lose—or rather, find—himself in a book, be it a romance, a history, or a poem.

Another danger which besets us as we grow older is a certain narrowness of outlook. We tend to regard everything from our own point

of view. In so doing we lose our capacity for sympathy; and when that is gone, we lose our power to love. And a loveless person is of all men the most miserable. We ought to read widely, and from every point of view, if we would avoid this soulless and restricted outlook. Other people have a right to be heard besides ourselves, and even if we do not agree with them we shall profit by reading of their ideals. We shall gain in sympathy and in love. Above all we may learn the great lesson of humility as soon as we have ceased to regard our own point of view as if it were of necessity that of Almighty God.

Besides quickening our imagination and broadening our outlook, the practice of reading is bound to give us some insight into human nature. We shall begin to understand that the author, as well as his characters, stands revealed in his book. It is not a very far step from that to understand that God is revealed there too. Insight into human nature and the revelation of the Divine within the human lead us to a remodelling of our whole life. We find an example and a warning for ourselves in the pages of every book we read. Our prayers and our deeds gain in power and force as we absorb into ourselves the teaching of our books.

If it be true that such is the value of reading, we ought to be careful to cultivate the studious character. Let us conclude this chapter by

asking a question. What are the books which a mystic should read ?

First and foremost, the Bible. The neglect of Bible-reading is one of the saddest factors in the life of the world to-day. It is not too much to say that most, if not all, of the restlessness of the present time owes its origin to this neglect. In a later chapter* we shall hope to suggest how the Bible may be used for purposes of meditation. Let us here be content with recommending its perusal in a broad and general way. Much of the significance of the Bible teaching is lost by those who are content to read it in piecemeal fashion. They lose thereby the main drift of its teaching, and never notice the great principles which underlie its doctrine. They cannot see the wood for the trees. We ought occasionally to read a whole book through at a time. Then we shall be able to follow its argument and catch its message. Later we can return to it in more detail for purposes of meditation. But before we dig for the gold, let us survey the whole surface.

The mystic ought to read the writings of those who have trodden the way before him. Above all, English-speaking people should be more familiar than they often are with the works of their own mystics. There is a flavour about their writings which marks them off from their continental companions. They reflect, in no small degree, the peculiar religious genius

* Chapter viii.

of the race.* Every English-speaking mystic should read at least the works of his mediæval spiritual ancestors, Mother Julian of Norwich, Richard Rolle of Hampole, Walter Hilton, and the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; and of their more recent successors, the Cambridge Platonists, William Blake, Francis Thompson, and many another. A course of reading along these lines is far more likely to prove of service to English mystics than the works of Thomas à Kempis,† Laurence Scupoli, St. Teresa, or even St. Ignatius Loyola.

Besides spiritual reading in the narrow sense of the word the mystic should read "so-called" secular literature. There is nothing secular except sin. Every book may lead the soul to God. The wonders of the natural world, history, biography, romance and travel, all serve to open the mind of man to the glories of God, and should lead him to worship. Even the daily newspaper reveals, to those who read it aright, the workings of the Spirit of God in the world of men to-day. Poetry must not be neglected, for the real poet is one who, through a divine intuition, possesses himself of the deep secrets of God.

All our observation and reading will serve to bring us to the Throne of Him who is the

* For a short Bibliography of works dealing with Mystical Theology, *see* Appendix.

† He may have been an Englishman; but his spirit is in closer affinity with the Continental writers.

Source of all knowledge and the Fountain of all wisdom. From reading, the mystic will pass to prayer. From knowledge *about* God his questing spirit is led to the knowledge *of* God.

Chapter VII

PRAYER

So much has been written about the theory and practice of prayer, that it might almost seem unnecessary to write, or read, this chapter. This would be the case, were it not that only a very small proportion of writers on the subject start from the mystic's standpoint. They are concerned for the most part with treating prayer philosophically, methodically, or dogmatically. They tend to regard it as a department of human life and activity from which they can stand apart, and of which they can write dispassionately and with a sense of mental aloofness. Such an attitude is impossible for a mystic. Prayer is the very breath of life to him, and he knows that to write of it, or even to talk about it, is to launch out into deeps which can only be navigated by experience, and can never be wholly charted upon the map of the interior life. To the non-mystic, a mystic's account of his experiences in prayer must always be more or less incoherent. Only one in sympathy with the writer's viewpoint can hope to catch the drift of his description. This

accounts in part for the difficulty that many people experience in reading the mystical writers.

What does prayer mean to a mystic? It does *not* mean "saying prayers." The extraordinary wealth of detail in intercession, in thanksgiving, in confession which often overloads the prayers of many really devout people finds little or no place in a mystic's devotion. They are not eliminated entirely. It would be more true to say that they are transformed. When the mystical state of prayer has been attained the details of devotion take on a new significance. The reason why so many people despair of making any progress in the life of prayer, is because they begin at the wrong end. They give their first care to details, and hope by this means to attain to the real spirit of prayer. This can never happen. They must begin by seeking to learn the secret of prayer, before they concern themselves with its details. This secret consists in regarding prayer as an abiding attitude of mind. "Pray without ceasing,"* said St. Paul. He could only mean by that "Remain in an interior attitude of prayer continually." It is manifestly impossible to expect people to pray continuously in the sense in which we use the word "pray" so often to-day. But it is quite possible to live out all your days in close communion with God, a communion unbroken by the daily task—and

* 1 Thess. v. 17.

this is the mystic's definition and experience of prayer. Prayer is an abiding attitude of the interior life, in which all the doors of the soul are open towards God, and are kept open by the will of him who prays.

The attainment of this condition of abiding prayer is not easy. It entails a long and rigorous practice on the part of the mystic. We may consider it under two aspects: at the appointed times, and at other seasons when the soul is not directly concerned with prayer.

How may we use the formal seasons of prayer as times wherein to attain to the sense of abiding communion with God? In prayer the spirit of man goes out to meet the Spirit of God. It cannot do this until it has set itself free from all that may hold it back. It is manacled and fettered by the body and the mind. Who does not know how easily prayer may be disturbed because the body is tired, or strained, or in pain? Who does not also know the distraction of wandering thoughts in prayer? Both these handicaps to prayer can be overcome. They *must* be overcome before the state of mystic contact with God — which is real prayer — can be attained. We need to still the body and to quiet the mind. The stilling of the body can be achieved by a patient seeking to forget it and its demands. At first the would-be mystic will find it as hard to forget a thing as he does to remember it. Only practice will give him the power to remove

his thoughts from the body and to forget its needs. When we give ourselves to the work of prayer we should make a conscious effort to forget the body by setting our thoughts elsewhere. Do not let us attempt to do anything else until we have learnt this lesson.

Next we must strive to quiet the mind, and to stay its restlessness. This is even harder than the stilling of the body, and will need an even greater patience before it becomes at all possible. Again and again we shall have to bring our thoughts back when they begin to stray.* Let this be done without any kind of impatience or irritability. A calm serenity is absolutely essential for the ultimate quieting of a restless mind. Until these two preliminary stages are past, no one can hope normally to attain to the mystic state of prayer. Do not let us attempt to pray until we are more or less proficient in both these exercises. When we have learnt to still the body and to quiet the mind, our spirit will be able to get into real and living touch with the Divine Spirit—*but not before*. Practice, practice; and at last we shall attain.

When the human spirit touches the Divine we shall experience the real sweetness of prayer. We shall be content to lie dormant in God's

* Care must be exercised in thus dealing with wandering thoughts. They may be due to the promptings of the Holy Ghost, in which case the soul must be led by them. In almost every instance it is possible to use a "wandering thought" as a means of approach to God.

arms, to whisper all our longings and desires in His Ears, and looking up into His Face, to tell Him of our failures and ask His forgiveness. Only when we have attained to the contact of spirit with Spirit ought we to give ourselves to intercession, thanksgiving and confession. Only then shall we be able to offer these things to God in accordance with His divine will.

If we are to pray without ceasing, we must not be content with merely using the appointed times of prayer for this purpose. We must keep the windows of the soul open at all times to the light and the air which flow from the Heavenly Places. All through the day our whole life should be lifted up as a living sacrifice to God. How is this to be done?

Again we must begin at the beginning. We must use our spare moments in this way. Even the busiest life has certain times when the mind is not occupied. What are the kind of thoughts which flood it at such moments? Use those moments for consciously realizing the Presence of God. Strive to recall His nearness to you. Lift up your heart to Him as you walk along the road or sit in your chair. Talk to Him. You will find as time goes on that the realization of His Presence with you will fill your whole life with an ineffable sweetness. You will long to extend the periods of this informal communion. You will gradually take God into your workshop, your business, your household, where before you used to bid Him

farewell. His Presence will spread itself over your whole life. You will be able to lift up your whole self to Him at all times and in all places. You will be able to take your work up into the Mount of Transfiguration and do it there, in an atmosphere of prayer, where the whole ground is wet with the dew of Heaven.

What is our idea of prayer? Is it concerned wholly, or even chiefly, with the divisions of prayer—intercession, thanksgiving, and so on, or is it the search of the spirit after God? Are we content to wait till we reach the Divine Presence before we present our petitions; or do we go down on our knees and at once open our little prayer-books? Books of devotion have a place in the spiritual life, but it is the subordinate one of reading; they have nothing to do with real prayer. If the reading of prayers out of a book be made a substitute for prayer, the book is doing an untold harm. If we would lead the mystic life we must be ready to abandon our books of devotion. We must learn to pray, and not be content with "saying our prayers." Prayer is work; the old Latin proverb is most profoundly true. It requires a tremendous effort on our part. It is "the real lifting up of the living soul to the Living God."* Until we have learnt to look upon prayer in this light, and to practise it in this way, we have

* I am indebted for this definition of Prayer to the author of "The Riches of Prayer" (Longmans); a book which ought to be widely known and read.

not made much progress along the pathway of the mystic life.

In every effort towards real prayer, at every step, we shall find God waiting for us. He will bless our efforts to reach Him, But for His grace, we should inevitably fail to arrive at our goal. Because of it we may hope to attain.

Chapter VIII

MEDITATION

IT will be gathered from the last chapter that prayer to the mystic means more than the saying of prayers. It is an attitude of the whole being towards God at all times and in all places. It is a continual effort on the part of man as he tries to lift up his whole life to the Heavenly Places. It is a continual dwelling in God and God in him.

Nevertheless there are certain exercises in the prayer-life which will from time to time occupy the energies of the mystic. Petition will have a place, though not as commonly practised. The mystic who exercises the ministry of intercession will not look with favour on the method of presenting the needs of individuals before the Throne of God by reading them from a previously prepared list. Mystic intercession consists rather in the practice of realizing a complete self-identification with those for whom we desire to ask God's help. We shall make a tremendous effort to enter into their lives as completely as possible; to penetrate into the innermost recesses of their hearts and minds, to

understand their thoughts and desires, and to lift them up, by virtue of our insight and interpenetration, before the Throne of God. The mystic will offer himself, on their behalf, as a sacrifice to God. He will consciously share in the royal priesthood of all believers in Christ.

So will it be with confession, with thanksgiving, with worship. As he goes through life the mystic will seek this identification of himself with his fellow-men. He will see how their lives are intermingled with his own. Because of his close union with God, and his real, conscious identification with the great heart of humanity, his intercessions will avail to bring about that union of human effort and divine grace which is the will of God.

So far from being unique in his manner of prayer, the mystic is rather the better fitted by reason of his insight and intuition to use the ordinary methods of devotion that are common to all Christian men. Before passing on to consider the mystic's use of meditation, it may not be amiss to say that the powers of insight and intuition may be trained and developed. Insight comes by sympathy, and sympathy is born of love. Let all who would seek to develop their gift of sympathy try the following plan. In every conversation, try to get inside the mind of your companion. See how his mind works, how it responds to the suggestions which your conversation carries. You will find that after a little while it will become quite

natural to you to realize exactly what is passing in the minds of other people. Another method of seeking to enter into the heart of humanity may be practised by those who live in a town. Walk the streets when a crowd of people are abroad. Walk with all your spiritual faculties alert, and you will find a strange exhilaration filling the innermost recesses of your being. You will be in touch with the great throbbing heart of all human life. It must be added that both of these exercises need infinite patience, and the absence of all sense of hurry.

It is in this respect that the practice of meditation will help. Quite apart from its objective value, it has the subjective effect of steeping the personality with the sense of an unruffled calm. No one who perseveres with meditation can ever be agitated; he will always preserve intact the inner peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Meditation is primarily an exercise of the mind upon the deep mysteries of God. The mind is not wholly stilled in meditation. It is guided, and allowed to feed itself upon God. It is a form of prayer, a section of the "holy art." Two things are required for its performance: a determination to persevere with the exercise in spite of disappointments; and—at the time of meditation—the power of mental concentration. Many people are put off from attempting to meditate either because they feel that the results are not justifying the efforts

they expend, or else because they find it hard to fix the mind upon the subject of the meditation. Not a few are also deterred by reading books which make out that meditation is a complicated kind of mental gymnastic, hedged round by an incredible number of rules and regulations. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. Just as books of devotion are useful in supplying forms and outlines of prayer, but harmful if used as substitutes for one's own prayer; so books about meditation are sometimes helpful as guides, but always harmful if used in any other way. *Everyone must make his own method in accordance with his own temperament.* With that proviso, let me describe my own method; if it can be called a method.

After a prayer for the guidance of the Holy Ghost and "the stilling of the body," I try to bring before my mind the object upon which I desire to meditate. It may be an incident of the Gospel narrative, or some interior grace of the soul, such as humility or purity, or even some sensible object, like an altar or a flower. When the image is formed in the imagination (the eyes are always closed to assist concentration of the mind) all the mental faculties are gathered together and poured upon the image. It is impossible to describe the process; but it is faintly reminiscent of the great Atlantic rollers dashing against and playing around some rock on the Cornish coast. This process is continued until the mind shows signs of exhausted energies,

when the faculties are removed from the object of the meditation and allowed to function at will. Sometimes (but not always) they bring back with them some priceless jewel which goes to enrich permanently the interior life. More often there is no apparent result—but always there is an increased sense of peace and serenity, which lingers about the daily path, and sheds an untold sweetness over all the daily activities.

It is not easy, or perhaps, desirable to write of one's own interior life. The last paragraph is only included as an example of the working out of a method of meditation for a particular individual. Let all who read this book try to meditate, but let each make his own method. If the task seem to be one where some kind of guidance is needed, do not hesitate to seek counsel from some expert in the spiritual life; but such advice must always be adapted to the capabilities or limitations of the particular case. Above all, do not fail to seek the help of the Holy Spirit of God, for He alone is the mystic's Guide.

Let this chapter end with two practical questions: When shall I meditate? and Where shall I meditate? The answer to the first is not difficult. Since meditation is primarily a mental exercise, we should practise it at times when the mind is most alert. Never meditate when the mental faculties are tired. It will strain them beyond their powers, and, moreover, concentration will be almost impossible. Find

out when your mind is most active, and meditate then. The answer to the second question is still easier. As with prayer so with meditation: it should be practised at all times and in all places. The stillness of a church is a good place, and so is the bustle of a railway station. God is everywhere, and the devout seeker will never fail to find Him. If external conditions are against the finding of God, the mystic can always retire within himself and enjoy the real presence of Christ in his own heart.

Chapter IX

CONTEMPLATION

MEDITATION is the means by which the soul approaches God through His creatures. By its very nature it can only be a stage on the way towards that vision of God which is the goal of the mystic quest. We are to consider now another spiritual exercise, of greater value than meditation, whereby God is known directly by the human spirit. This exercise is called *Contemplation.*

As we pass from stage to stage of the mystic life, the description of our experiences becomes more and more difficult. Words seem to convey so little of that wonder which the knowledge of God in the interior life brings to the mystic. Moreover, his descriptions seem to become more and more puerile. We have only to read such a book as Mother Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love* to be struck with the childlike simplicity of much that she writes. It is this childlike writing which annoys and irritates the non-mystic. He has not learnt as yet that the condition of entry into the kingdom of Heaven is that he should be converted and become as a little child.*

* St. Matt. xviii. 3.

In writing of Contemplation it is difficult to keep the mean between this "childlikeness" (I cannot write "childishness," which is a very different thing) and the over-effusiveness of description which offends in an opposite direction. If this chapter should seem to fail in either of these respects, I would humbly crave pardon of my readers, and proffer as my excuse the extraordinary difficulty of writing about an intimate spiritual experience.

What is Contemplation? In its simplest form, it is a certain fearful and loving gaze into the Face of God. "As the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters . . . even so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God."* It is the direct action of the spirit of man upon God, without any intervening medium. In contemplation we see God (as far as our sinfulness will allow) face to face.

Contemplation is of two kinds, which have been called respectively "acquired" and "infused." The former is, in the main, the result of our own efforts, the latter is the free gift of God. Acquired contemplation is reached by slow degrees and always occurs during the time of prayer; infused contemplation occurs in an instant and at any time. It is with acquired contemplation that we are chiefly concerned in this chapter.

It sometimes happens that meditation suddenly becomes difficult, and almost distasteful

* Psalm cxxiii. 2 (Prayer Book Version).

to us. Many souls have experienced this sensation after years of sustained effort; and are quite naturally disappointed and discouraged. In nine cases out of ten, however, such an experience is really a call to "go up higher" in the spiritual life, and to leave meditation for contemplation. When that is realized, the soul naturally asks how to contemplate. What is the method of this exercise?

As with meditation so with contemplation, each individual must make his own method in accordance with his own particular temperament. It is, however, possible to describe in rough outline the general principles of contemplation. The same method of stilling the body must be employed at the beginning of the exercise. Then comes the stilling of the mind of which we have already said something in writing of Prayer.* This latter is an exceedingly difficult exercise, and years of patient endeavour are needed before we can gain even the smallest control over our thoughts. We need to practise thought-control at times other than our formal seasons of prayer. We must train our thoughts by teaching ourselves to think (or not think) of particular objects at a particular time. If we do this regularly, patiently, and without any kind of irritation at our constant failures, we shall find that we are gradually learning to control our thoughts. Our mental faculties become obedient to the higher centres

* Chapter vii.

of the spiritual life. In applying this result to the practice of contemplation, we must use it for the stilling of all the mental faculties. One by one they must be quieted, thoughts must be imprisoned, desires checked, every wayward emotion put under restraint. The mind and its faculties must, like the body, lie absolutely dormant. Then the spirit can break loose, and plunge itself at will into the illimitable depths of Divine Love. This is contemplation.

Infused contemplation, on the other hand, comes through no conscious effort on the part of the individual. Suddenly, and without warning, the Spirit of God comes into touch with the spirit of man. The senses are destroyed for the time being; the desires and thoughts of the mind are quieted; the body forgotten. Only into the innermost depths of the being there comes a flood of ineffable light, unspeakable words are heard, and a mysterious sweetness is experienced. Such is another, and even more wonderful, form of contemplation.

The practice of contemplation belongs to that stage of Union with God which is the goal of the mystic pilgrimage. When we have attained to any reality of contemplation, we have probably travelled as far as it is possible to go during our earthly life-time.* From the heights of divine union, we can look back over the stages of our advance. We can look out on the hurry-

* It is given to few mystics to attain the sublime heights reached by Ruysbroek and described by him in *The Book of the Sparkling Stone*.

ing, busy world around us, and see, underlying all the ceaseless activity of human life, the unity of the great purpose of God. Like a silken thread interwoven in the fabric of the whole, we can see the divine plan working itself out through the lives of men. We have come to regard human life from the standpoint of the divine. We are at one with God.

Chapter X

COLDNESS IN DEVOTION

PRAYER is the act by which the soul comes into touch with God. Looked at from an outside point of view, it would seem that prayer should be a constant source of joy to the Christian. And so it is, normally. Nevertheless, there come times in his life when prayer seems anything but delightful and refreshing. It is a weariness to the flesh and a burden to the spirit. He cannot lift his soul above the deserts of the world ; he cannot climb to the mountain-tops where the fresh breezes of heaven blow. The warm spirit of devotion seems utterly dead. We will examine some of the many causes of such an experience, and seek to discover remedies for it.

1. *Ill Health.* Body, mind and spirit are a trinity in the nature of man. Together they form a perfect man. Each acts and re-acts upon the others, and disease or ill-health in one has a far-reaching effect upon the whole personality. If the body is " out of sorts " the mind and the spirit suffer with it. A lowered physical vitality will lead to an inability

to use mind and spirit aright. Prayer becomes increasingly difficult as the body weakens. At times such as these it is well to remember that prayer consists not at all in articulated desires. The movement of the heart in love towards God is the only true prayer. Many a sick man has learnt to bless his illness, for it has taught him the true secret of prayer. To lie still and quiet in the arms of God, to desire nothing so much as God Himself, to pour out the heart in longings for Himself, this is true prayer. We need not be disturbed when illness empties the soul of all desire for vocal or mental prayer. We can take refuge in a certain devout longing for God. "My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God."* So will our coldness of spirit be superseded by a grateful warmth and a sense of wondrous peace.

2. *Weariness* is akin to ill-health as a frequent cause of coldness in devotion. But whereas the latter often admits of no cure, weariness can nearly always be overcome by rest. No one should sleep too much, but no one should unnecessarily curtail his times of rest. To do so not only affects the general health of the body, but it also endangers the interior life. Prayer is work, and as such requires the faculties of the mind and spirit to be alert. If our other work allows it, we ought to exercise great care lest our bodies become too tired for prayer. It is just as im-

* Psalm xlii. 2.

portant to have a fixed time for going to bed as it is to have such a time for getting up. And when all else is said, why should we not use those moments when our faculties are freshest as our times of devotion? There is no special merit in praying just before we go to bed. An act of commendation is all that is needed then. We should find out, by experiment, when we are most alert, and, if possible, give that time to prayer.

3. *Monotony* sometimes cools the spirit of fervour. We say the same prayers, at the same time, in the same place, day by day. We adopt the same posture and (if such be our custom) use the same devotional books. No wonder our prayers tend to weary us by their sameness and lack of inspiration. We need to take drastic steps to remedy this evil. We should put our books on one side, and try to frame our prayers out of the deeps of our own experience. In the chapter on Prayer we have already spoken of the danger of devotional books. At best, they tend to induce in our prayer-life a deadly monotony. The same may be said of a constant use of the same place and posture for prayer. We should train ourselves to pray in all places and under all conditions. On a long railway journey, in a crowded room, we should still be able to lift up our hearts to God. Quite apart from the intrinsic value of such prayers, they will have the effect of preventing monotony and keeping the spirit fresh and active. There is

room for great boldness in dealing with ourselves when the interior life becomes dull and dreary. We must not shrink from the most drastic measures if we are to recapture the warm and vital spirit of true devotion.

4. *Lack of Desire.* By far the most distressing symptom (for it is symptomatic rather than causal) of coldness in devotion consists in the lack of any real desire for prayer. At times the mere thought of prayer makes us bored. It is a hateful experience, but a frequent one. The remedy is hard to seek. It may be due to any of the preceding causes, and if so it should be treated accordingly. The sovereign remedy would seem to be faith, though faith be hard to obtain. Tell yourself again and again that God is waiting to hear your prayer, and at whatever personal effort, *force yourself to pray.*

Each and all of these causes may lead to coldness in devotion. Nevertheless in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the true cause lies deeper. It is sin that cuts the soul off from God, and shuts out the light of Heaven. When we are troubled by this distressing experience we should have immediate recourse to self-examination. We should dig deep into the foundation of our life and try to discover what is amiss. Self-examination should be followed by confession, and confession by absolution and amendment. Then the sense of the Presence of God will indeed return, and we shall experience once again the joy of prayer and devotion.

To sum up, we may say that there are, in general, two types of cure we may apply in cases when the spirit of devotion is cold. We may rest altogether from the work of prayer. This may seem a very desperate remedy, and many may hesitate to use it, believing it to be contrary to the mind and will of God. Nevertheless, experience goes to prove that such a measure is frequently effective. Give yourself a rest from all prayer for a few days, and you will find that you will come back to your spiritual exercises with renewed zest and an eager longing for the joys of communion with God.

It has been well said that the best rest consists not in idleness but in change of occupation. The truth of this saying is self-evident, for it is never a wise thing to leave any part of our personality unprovided for. Satan does indeed find an occupation for those who are idle. In cases of devotional coldness and spiritual boredom we might profitably substitute mental for vocal prayer, or vice-versa. We should be at pains to find new forms of self-denial and bodily mortification; to change our intention when we come to the Holy Eucharist; to adopt a new method and new subjects in meditation; to change our spiritual reading. Such a procedure will often avail to stir the flagging energies of our spiritual life, and bring back the happiness of prayer.

When this experience of coldness and lack of

devotion comes upon us we need to remind ourselves again and again of the truth that true religion does not depend upon our feelings. This is a snare into which Christians too often fall. When they no longer feel happy in their religion they think that something must be wrong in their lives, and they make themselves miserable when they can find no ostensible cause of their experience. It may well be that God wills it for them as a test of the reality of their religious profession. The mystics have written much of the Dark Night of the Soul when God turns His Face away and they no longer experience any sensible joy. Happy are the souls who have reached this stage in their spiritual progress. They share in no small degree the experience of Jesus on the Cross; they say with Him, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* At such a time let them hold fast to their profession knowing well that the "trying of their faith worketh patience." They should "let patience have her perfect work, for so they will be made perfect and entire, lacking nothing."† Beyond the Cross is the Crown, and at the appointed season the darkness of the night gives place to the radiant glories of the dawning day.

> And then at last I caught a glimpse
> Of that averted Face.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I knew the night had passed, and with the morn
> Had come a joy, and that deep peace

* St. Mark xv. 34. † St. James i. 3, 4.

That passeth knowledge, for I saw again
His Face: and lo, it bore the marks
Of all my struggles. He had borne them too,
And on His toilworn Face there lingered still
The impress of that wondrous tender smile,
More beauteous than before, telling of conflict past,
—Aye, and of victory won.

Chapter XI

DOUBT

THERE are few mystics who do not at some time or another experience intellectual difficulties as part of their discipline. It is not the purpose of this chapter to deal with special difficulties, but rather to treat of the experience itself. If we can discover some of the rules which control the work of the intellect in the spiritual life, it ought not to be difficult to apply them in individual cases.

In the first place we must insist that the intellect is only one of many avenues by which we come to know facts. Human personality is a very complex thing, and, in addition to his intellect a man possesses various senses, instincts and emotions. Knowledge comes to him through each and all of these faculties. Through his senses he is made aware of the material objects which surround him — their size, colour and shape. His senses also bring impressions to his notice, such as temperature, scent, and taste. It is partly through the acquisition of these facts that his actions are guided and directed. Another

series of perceptions opens out before his emotions. Love and hatred, wholly indescribable in their mode of approach, are communicated to man through the emotions; and these in their turn influence, and partly control, the outward activities.

The knowledge of God may come through either or both of these ways, or directly by spiritual contact. The immediate knowledge of God Himself is not a monopoly of those who dwell apart from their brethren. It may be the experience of the busiest worker in the world. Singleness of desire is the sole condition of such knowledge. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."* The knowledge of God springs from a desire for, and issues in a choice of, Him.

All this range of knowledge in which the intellect plays little or no part has for its ultimate aim the information of the will, which is the very crown of the human personality. The will, fed by the senses, the emotions, and the spirit, finds its expression in acts of choice. It is the same with that sphere of knowledge which is mainly accessible to the intellect. The mind collects and classifies facts supplied to it either directly, or through the senses and emotions. Its main purpose is to supply the will with information upon which it may exercise its power of choice.

Religion is the only thing in the world which

* St. Matt. v. 8.

makes its appeal alike to all sides of the human personality. There are people whose religion seems at first sight to be confined entirely to the emotions or the senses, but as a matter of fact it does appeal in an elementary way to other sides of the personality. If it does not it is not a real religion. Our Lord is very clear on the universality of the appeal of religion. " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind."*

It is well to consider this saying of Christ, for it leads us still further in our investigation of the experience of doubt. All knowledge is to be directed to one end—Love. The whole personality is to be educated in the School of Love. All knowledge is to have as its ultimate end the more perfect love of God and man. Hence it is true to say that the work of the intellect in the spiritual life is that of assisting the will to choose the pathway of love.

Whence spring then what are called " doubts " or " intellectual difficulties ? " They come normally from a misdirection of the energies of the mind. It is quite easy to allow the mind to become misdirected, and such deviation of aim generally manifests itself in one of two directions.

The intellect may be wholly given over to the spirit of curiosity. It may wander beyond its legitimate sphere of action and in so doing it not only impairs its own efficiency, but seriously

* St. Luke x. 27.

jeopardizes the working of the whole personality. The experience of all mystics is that the intellect must be wholly stilled before the spirit can touch God.*

There are realms of experience in which not the intellect but faith is the proper guide.

The other misdirection of the energies of the intellect consists in the inordinate desire of knowledge for its own sake. This is a well-known danger under a more subtle guise. As St. Augustine points out, the only legitimate desire of the human soul is the desire for rest in God. All the energies of the soul are to be directed to this one end. There is no room in the Christian life for any other cult save that of God Himself. "Art for art's sake" is an impossibility for a Christian. Knowledge for its own sake may become a virtual denial of God.

Either of these misdirections of energy may lead a mystic to doubt. The spirit of curiosity which refuses to confine the mind to its legitimate sphere may be fruitful of disaster to the whole personality. The desire of knowledge for its own sake may draw the soul away from God. Moreover the lack of any systematic balancing of the facts of experience will result in a one-sided outlook upon life.

If this be a true description of the origin of a

* Father A. Baker in his book, *Holy Wisdom*, says :— "As for the proper exercise of active contemplation, it consists not at all in speculation, but in blind elevations of the will, and engulfing it more and more profoundly in God, with no other sight or knowledge of Him but of an obscure faith only."

large number of doubts, theinitial stage in their solution is obvious. There must be a searching examination as to the direction of the mental energies. The motive which prompts intellectual activity must be discovered. Should the motive prove to be either curiosity or the love of knowledge for its own sake, it must be purged of selfishness and re-directed towards the service of God and man. If the mind display a lack of system in its working it must be restored to its true balance by the double process of pruning excrescences and supplying that which is lacking. Many genuine cases of doubt will respond to such treatment as this.

There yet remain to be considered the cases where the intellect is really inspired by love, and yet the doubts remain. At such times we must look upon our doubts as tests of our sincerity. It is worse than useless to suggest that we should give up what appears to be an unequal contest and allow ourselves to acquiesce in that which we cannot reasonably accept. Such a course is to stifle conscience and desert the quest of truth. Sympathy and patience are needed, and, above all, the encouragement to go forward. The soul that gives up the search for truth finds itself in a hell of its own making. It is far better to suffer the pains of honest doubt than to enjoy an outward comfort which is joined to inward self-condemnation. God is ever giving fresh revelations of His truth to men, and He usually gives it to those souls

who have come through the darkness of doubt and difficulty. The light always seems brightest to those who emerge from the gloom of a long tunnel.

We have purposely confined our attention to genuine cases of intellectual difficulty. We have taken for granted the moral integrity of the subject. Sin infects the whole personality with poison, and may possibly result in intellectual difficulties. In dealing with all cases of doubt it is well to extend self-examination to cover all departments of life.

Those who have not been called upon to face such trials can hardly expect to realise the pain of doubt. Those who have endured them will know best how to counsel others. They will know how to sympathize and encourage, how to agonize in prayer for, and with, their brethren. They will be able to console them with that comfort wherewith they themselves were comforted of God.

Chapter XII

DESPAIR

THIS chapter would not have been written at all were it not that many mystics who experience the "divine dark" are grievously tempted to despair of God's love and goodness. It seems to them so cruel that they should have to tread the Valley of the Shadows instead of dwelling for ever with the Beloved on the Everlasting Hills. To be colloquial, they feel that they have been "taken in" by God. They think of themselves as men who have deserved a blessing and received a curse. The tempter comes and suggests to them the utter futility of treading in the mystic way, since they derive so little happiness from the journey, and bids them eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow they will surely die.

Despair is the last and most formidable of all the temptations of the Devil. When he has exhausted all other means of leading the soul astray, he suggests the uselessness of virtue, and the apparent vanity of the Christian hope. To most men this temptation to despair of God and of their own selves acts as an incentive to

carelessness of life and morality. The fevered desire for sensation, and the restlessness of the searcher after bodily or mental pleasures, are the surest symptoms of a heart given over to despair. Beneath all the brave show of an outward enjoyment of life, there lies at the heart the canker of despair.

It is quite unnecessary to go on describing the symptoms of despair; happy is the man who has never experienced it! Most men in greater or lesser degree, at some time or another are thus tempted. It is, indeed, the fiercest strife in which the Christian soul must engage, and blessed are those who endure steadfast to the end. The agony of despair needs all the courage, natural and supernatural, which a man can summon at the moment of attack, and even then it is only the grace of God which will carry him through. Nevertheless, though the strife is so fierce at the actual moment of temptation, it is possible to fortify the soul beforehand against such an attack. It is worth while considering one or two of the means by which the soul is prepared to face the temptation to despair.

The Christian mystic should seek at all times to cultivate the spirt of thankfulness, for that is always a characteristic mark of the saints of God. Some words of William Law, the eighteenth-century mystic, may be quoted in this connection: "Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who

prays most, or fasts most ; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity and justice ; but it is he who is always thankful to God."* Apart from sweetening the character, the spirit of thankfulness is a real protection against despair. How shall it be cultivated ? All day long let us be watching for the tender mercies of God. They are strewn in a lavish profusion around our path, but our eyes are so often closed to their beauty. " Blind eyes ! Blind eyes ! The very forest could teach thee these things an thou would'st learn," sang the little maid to the young monk in Michael Fairless' wonderful book, *The Gathering of Brother Hilarius*. We need to keep our eyes open and night by night, as we search our hearts for the presence of sin, to recall God's blessings to us and pour out the gratitude of our loving hearts. So shall we grow in thankfulness, and the temptation to despair will not so easily overwhelm us.

In addition to the culitivation of a thankful spirit we should train ourselves to look out beyond the present into the future. We should never lose sight of the Crown just behind and beyond the Cross. It is as men and women who are for ever looking unto the Lord, whose eyes are strained towards the distant horizon, that we shall best pass through the fires of temptation in this present life. Those who have learnt to think of time in terms of eternity, of

* *A Serious Call.* Chapter xv.

mortal life in terms of an endless immortality, will not be unduly cast down at the trials and temptations that discipline the soul during its earthly pilgrimage.

There is no surer means for the acquiring of a thankful spirit, and no stronger defence against despair, than a constant and devout use of Sacraments. Of this more will be said in the next chapter. Here it will suffice to notice that the true significance, and the reality, of the sacramental grace is an experience that only dawns slowly upon the soul. At first the sacraments seem to be lacking in reality, and faith alone keeps the soul steadfast in the use of them. Only as faith slowly changes into certainty, and the mystic can look back over a long period of sacramental experience, does the full value of the habitual use of these divine ordinances break in upon his soul.

Despair is a temptation which no man can fight in his own strength. Only as he marks the wonderful workings of God and counts his blessings day by day; only as he learns to view all life from the standpoint of God, which is the standpoint of eternity; only as he seeks the divine grace communicated in the sacraments can he face the dreary deserts of a long-continued period of despair. But God is good and will not let us be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, so that we may be able to bear it.*

* *cf.* 1 Cor. x. 13.

Chapter XIII

THE SACRAMENTS

IT is the author's hope that at some future date he may have leisure enough to write a book on the Sacraments. Such a book would naturally attempt to treat of the value, from a philosophical as well as a theological and mystical standpoint, of the sacramental view of life. This present chapter takes a narrower outlook, and is solely concerned with the mystic's use of sacraments. If it be thought that the subject is too summarily dismissed, it should be borne in mind that this book itself is a witness to the importance of the sacramental view of life.

The best working definition of a sacrament for our purpose is that which describes it as " an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace." There are two parts to a sacrament—an outward and an inward—and these are intimately related each to each. Thus it is not enough to say that the outward sign *represents* the inward grace; nor can we say that the outward and inward parts are in any sense *identical*. The relationship is more subtle and

less easy of definition. A sacrament is the meeting point of two orders of being. The spiritual impinges upon the natural, and the natural becomes the vehicle of the spiritual.

Before the eyes of the mystic there opens up a wonderful conception of the material order. He sees it not as something static, dead; nor as a hindrance to the free working of the Divine Spirit in the world of men and things. It is dynamic, pulsing with the life of the Spirit of God which seeks by these means to communicate its very essence to the spirit of man. No mystic can regard matter in any other light than as the vehicle of the Spirit's working. Every material object is informed and saturated with the spiritual; and the mystic knows by his own personal experience that the spirit of man must pass through the "outward, visible sign" in order to appropriate the treasures of "the inward spiritual grace." There in the inner sphere is Reality. Once through the doorway of the senses the mystic is at home.

God conveys spiritual gifts through material objects. The mystic clearly recognizes this fact and acts upon it. He knows that the beauty of nature does not merely represent the beauty of God. It conveys the real beauty to the spirit which is attuned to it. Divine and natural beauty are not to be confused. They are distinct; one is the Reality, the other is the vehicle whereby it becomes perceptible to man.

Because he has learnt to find God by the

means of His creatures, the mystic naturally seeks such communion everywhere. He knows that only within the sphere of the divine Presence is to be found the fullness of joy. The mystic uses every creature as a sacrament to bring God into his life, and to lift up his life to God. He knows that such a use of the creatures has not only a divine sanction, but that it is the only true purpose of the creature's existence.* The true mystic does not despise the sacraments of the Church.† Since everything is sacramental, he is led to appreciate even more fully the official sacramental ordinances of the Christian Religion. Baptism brings the soul within the covenanted sphere of divine grace; Penance restores a sinner to intimacy with God; Communion brings him into a real, vital, living touch with God Himself.‡

In everything that he does, within the Church or without, the mystic draws near to the well of living waters. He is for ever plunging his

* *Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola*: "Man was created . . . to praise, reverence, and serve the Lord." "All other beings or objects placed around man on earth have been created for him, to serve as means to assist him in the pursuit of the end for which he was created."

† "It is quite possible that a glib acquiescence in the statement that 'all life is sacramental' might encourage such a process of secularization as to leave no scope for the recognition of spiritual values. If this be the case, sacraments as institutions need to be still maintained, even by those who constantly profess and enjoy the sacramental view of life." Gardner, *History of Sacrament, in relation to Thought and Progress*. p. 96.

‡ Any attempt at enumeration or classification of sacramental ordinances appears to the author to be unnecessary, and, indeed, impossible.

earth-stained soul deep in the cleansing flood of divine grace. He feeds his life on the divine life, and knows that in every sacrament is that meeting-place of human and divine for which his soul craves, and of which his whole life is an earnest and a witness.

Chapter XIV

BEAUTY

THE mystic life has been described by a modern writer* as "a taste of Heaven in daily life." Its final reward lies beyond the grave and gate of death, and the fullness of joy will only be experienced by the mystic in the life to come. But for all that, the union of his spirit with God will bring not a few pearls of great price to the mystic in this life. A new sense and appreciation of beauty is not the least of these treasures.

What is beauty? Does it exist objectively, or only in the mind which sees or hears it? This is an old controversy. Some have maintained that beauty actually exists. They have laid down certain canons by which it can be tested. They have dissected it, criticized it, classified it. Others have turned in horror from such a cold-blooded conception of beauty. They have maintained that each mind makes, as it were, its own beauty. To different minds the same association may or may not bring the sense of beauty. From this they deduce that

* Horace Hutchinson.

beauty is subjective, and more or less dependent for its existence upon the image which it records, or the impression it sets, upon the mind at a particular moment.

The truth concerning the nature of beauty probably lies somewhere between the two.* It actually exists, but the senses must be trained to notice and appreciate it. A quickened perception of beauty is one of the fruits of the mystic life. How does this come about? Properly to understand how it is that a mystic is one who sees beauty more readily than a non-mystic, we need to return for a moment to consider what the controversy mentioned above has to teach us. For the mystic can appreciate both sides of the question, and by his appreciation he is able to harmonize two apparently conflicting opinions.

The mystic believes that beauty exists objectively as the revelation of God. He knows that all material objects are the vehicles of the Spirit. He believes all outward appearances to be sacraments of Reality. His experience has taught him that everything which he can touch or see or hear is saturated with a spirit which is beyond his sense-perceptions. Furthermore, he sees that it is the presence of this interpenetrating spirit which makes a material object beautiful. Beauty is the Reality behind the veil of the senses. In other words, beauty is God imma-

* I am disposed to think that the Theory of Relativity may ultimately help towards a solution of this, and similar philosophical and metaphysical problems.

nent in creation. When we gaze on a wonderful vision in nature or art we are gazing through a veil into the Face of God. To the mystic every bush, every stone, every wave of the sea, or breeze on the hill-top, is crammed full of divinity, instinct with God. Nothing to the mystic is ugly, save sin, which shuts out the vision of God from his view. Wherever he goes, in town or country, in the crowded streets or along the lonely moors, God is for ever blinding his wondering eyes with a rich extravagance of beauty.

This leads to the second reason why a mystic is of all men most capable of perceiving and appreciating beauty. Not only does beauty exist objectively, but it needs a spirit cleansed and purified to perceive its existence. The soul which is governed by the carnal mind will only see a material object: the soul of the mystic, because it is led of the spirit, will reach out and merge itself in the spirit which underlies and permeates the material object. A man of the world (using the expression in its ordinary sense) will look at a factory, and will only see a place where men and women toil and money is produced. The mystic sees the spirit at work striving to express itself through the material surroundings, hampered and thwarted though it be at every turn. He will see the little lives of men and women caught up into the great stream of Becoming—the never-ceasing ebb and flow of all human existence—and seeing

this, he will see the Spirit of God at work, and where God is he will find beauty.

This perception of beauty is something which none but a mystic or an artist (and all true artists are mystics, and mystics are artists) can fully understand. To them it is almost overpowering in its effects. It staggers them to see Reality at every turn. The flood of beauty, the great sacrament of the Spirit of God, pours itself into their hearts, inebriates them with a wild and almost delirious joy. Again and again they plunge into the limitless depths of Divine beauty. Action and reaction; beauty poured out upon man; man plunging his whole life into beauty; such is the experience of the mystic. To describe it is beyond words.

The finer perceptions of our human nature so easily become blunted. Men are tempted to steel themselves against any great emotion, whether of joy or sorrow. Especially does this seem to be so with the Anglo-Saxon people. We are so terribly afraid of betraying any outward emotion that we frequently succeed in damaging, almost beyond repair, our powers of feeling altogether. The mystic must avoid this result. However much he may decide not to show his emotion, he must take great care not to blunt his powers of feeling. If this latter happen to him, he may perhaps escape any great suffering, but he will never be able to rise to the sublime heights of divine bliss. If he is prepared to suffer he will attain to such an

appreciation of beauty as is quite beyond description. If he turn away from suffering, pain, and all the so-called ugly things of life, he will not experience its beauty. To explain this apparent contradiction is the purpose of the next chapter, but it cannot be too strongly affirmed that, not by avoiding pain is beauty to be found, but only by treading deliberately along the highway of the Holy Cross.

Chapter XV

PAIN

IT is the experience of the mystic that beauty goes hand in hand with pain. In his own life he knows well how closely the two are intermingled. Beauty floods his whole being, and almost at the same time pain lays its hand upon him. He suffers acutely, and in his suffering he discovers beauty. Indeed, the mystic has learnt that they are not twain but one flesh; each is but another aspect of Divine Love.

This experience of the mystic does not run counter to the teachings of science and philosophy, or the workings of nature. Indeed, it confirms them, and brings a proven fact home as a living experience. Beauty and pain are mingled so closely in nature that they merge into one. Nature by itself is beautiful and horrible all at once. It has been suggested that colour is due to decomposition—and that the more advanced the state of decay, the more beautiful is the colour. Whether that be so or not, it is most certainly true that besides all the beauty and wonder of nature, there exists

within it both suffering and pain. Nature is fair to gaze upon at the same time that she is "red in tooth and claw." Pan is there as well as God.

If we turn to human nature we meet with the same difficulty in trying to separate beauty and pain. The most saintly characters are often those who are made perfect through suffering. It is the miracle of all miracles to watch the full beauty of a character being revealed through pain. Every time we see it we should thank God for it. Whether the pain be physical, mental or spiritual, if it is received aright it will result in a more beautiful and saintly character. This truth will repay further development.

First of all, there are different kinds of pain. Some souls experience it in the physical plane; others in the mental; others again in the spiritual. To some the experience comes in all three. It is interesting, and not without significance, that these three kinds of pain should correspond with the three stages of the mystic way. The stage of Purgation is primarily concerned with the body; the stage of Illumination with the mind; the stage of Union with the spirit. The temptations of the mystic usually attack him in that order. First, he has to fight temptation in the flesh, then in the mind, and, lastly, in the spirit. It is not unreasonable to suppose that suffering should come to him in the same order. This fact may account for the

curious desire of bodily suffering to be found in the writings of some mystics.* Without this experience they feel that something is lacking.

We may go on to ask the purpose of suffering. The answer will take one or two forms. Suffering may be punitive, or it may be purifying, or a combination of the two. Medical science is not silent in proclaiming the punitive character of much suffering. The health of the body is governed by laws, and if these laws be broken the health will be impaired. How much suffering, for instance, is due to an uncontrolled self-indulgence of the appetites ? On the other hand, a great deal of suffering can be set down to no definite cause. What are we to say of that ? It is not punitive, save in the sense that the general degeneration of the whole human race is accountable for its presence in the innocent. We will return to that fact in a moment. If it is not truly punitive its purpose can only be conceived as forming part of a great purifying process. It is in this direction that a partial explanation of this experience of pain would seem to lie. Every soul has its own characteristics, its own virtues and its own vices. Hence it follows that each soul needs a particular discipline to enable it to reach perfection. For some, that discipline consists of pain, physical, mental, spiritual, or even all three. To such God, in His love and wisdom, sends pain. In some such way as this pain is seen to be not a

* *e.g.* Mother Julian, of Norwich.

horrible, unreasoning tyranny, but a gentle, tender guidance of the soul along the pathway of the inner life.

How does the mystic face pain, either in his own life or in that of others? As in all other experiences, he seeks to identify himself with it. He does not shrink from it, neither does he meekly bow his head before it. He meets it openly, embraces it, and draws it into the very fibre of his being. Without any hypocrisy he glories in it. It is a real cross-bearing to him, and brings him into the closest possible union with the great Cross-bearer. To him there is nothing morbid in the willing acceptance of pain, and nothing sentimental in the desire for it. It is the most real thing in life to him. It is a revelation of the most exquisite beauty. Not alone for its results in the lives of men and of himself does he love suffering and seek for pain. He loves it for itself. Such an attitude is often entirely incomprehensible to the non-mystic; but for the mystic it is the most ordinary, and most wonderful, thing in the world.

The world is full of beauty and full of pain. It is at least arguable that were the beauty taken away the pain would likewise disappear. The two apparently opposite things are in reality one. Each is an integral factor in the wonderful love of God.

There remains one other aspect of the mystic's attitude towards pain to be considered. It is the mystery of vicarious suffering, whereby one

suffers for another. At first sight this appears to be a monstrous travesty of the most elementary justice. From this point of view the atoning death of Christ upon the Cross—the innocent suffering for the guilty—has seemed to many to be something wholly repellent and utterly horrible. Yet it is not so really. The mystic knows that all mankind is essentially one. The solidarity of the human race is a real thing to him. He sees that all the individual lives of men and women in the world are so intimately interwoven one with another as to form one coherent whole. The Christian doctrine of the Communion of Saints carries this truth a step further. It proclaims that even death does not cut a soul off from the great body of mankind. All human life, on earth and beyond the veil, is one, and it is possible, and even necessary, to think of it as a single unit. Such a belief will have many and varying consequences. We are only concerned for the moment with its influence upon the mystic's attitude towards pain.

By virtue of the one-ness of the human race and because of its sinfulness, the presence of pain in the world is not wholly inexplicable. Neither is it difficult to see that the bearing of pain may be, and often is, the experience of the innocent. When this happens the innocent person is a privileged being. He is allowed to bear, in his own body, the marks of the Lord Jesus, not for himself, but for others. He has

reached the highest expression of love. He is laying down his life in a daily crucifixion for the sake of his brethren. In the light of this knowledge, inadequate though it may be, it is possible to face the problem of vicarious suffering.

His realisation of the unity of all mankind leads the mystic to believe in the possibility of "substitution" in suffering. He has always claimed and frequently demonstrated that it is possible to transfer pain from one person to another. Such a doctrine has been derided, yet it is a logical consequence of a firm belief in the essential unity of humanity. How this experiment can be carried out is beyond the scope of this book to explain, but if thoughts can be conveyed, even during the separation of the parties, and if cures can be worked from a distance, the claim of a mystic to be able to bear another's suffering is not an absurd one.

The life of union has many wonderful fruits. Those who have reached this stage know what they are. All the apparent contradictions of life are seen to be parts of one great whole, merged and welded into one by the divine Spirit of God. We have considered separately the mysteries of beauty and pain. As we draw nearer and nearer to God these two mysteries approach each other. When we have reached the stage of divine union, we may be allowed to see that all beauty is pain, and that all pain is illuminated by the golden rays of a heavenly beauty.

Chapter XVI

ECSTACIES, VISIONS AND LOCUTIONS

THERE is a widespread impression that a mystic is one who passes through strange experiences along the pathway of the interior life. In a sense, this is true, though the experiences are not always those which are attributed to him. Normally a mystic is no whit different from his fellowmen, save perhaps that his heightened consciousness of spiritual things makes him less prone to anxiety over his outward circumstances, He may see visions and hear voices, but such are not of the essence of his experience. Mysticism to be of any real value must concern the will rather than the senses or the emotions.

In this chapter we will consider briefly some of the more extraordinary phenomena which appear from time to time in the experience of the great mystics.

1. *Ecstasy.* In this state there appears to be an almost complete loss of the senses. Some mystics while in this condition appear unable to see or hear normally, and even to taste or smell. They become, for the time, in-

sensible to pain. Movement of any kind is well-nigh impossible. Such are the chief symptoms of the state of ecstasy. It is due, normally, to the wonder of adoration which fills the soul of the contemplative as he gazes upon the splendour of God. There is always the danger—and it is important to remember it—that such an experience may be self-induced. A genuine ecstasy is always, of course, the gift of God.

2. *Vision.* This experience is even more common than that of estacy. Frequently at the beginning of the mystical life God grants a vision of Himself in order to persuade the pilgrim soul to adventure itself still further along the mystic way. From time to time the weary soul is refreshed by a momentary glimpse of the goal of all its striving. As the journey draws to an end the vision becomes clearer and more constant until at last it is transfigured and transformed into an abiding Reality.

3. *Locution.* The hearing of voices is no infrequent or unusual experience of the mystic. Like St. Paul he is from time to time " caught up into paradise, and hears unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

What is to be the attitude of the Christian mystic towards such phenomena as these? Those who have experienced them, one and all give the same strange advice : " Resist them to the uttermost of your power." So remarkable is this unanimity that we do well to try and

* 2 Cor. xii. 4.

discover the reason for such an attitude. It is because they realize only too well that behind so fair an outward appearance may lurk a grave moral peril. Ecstacies, visions, and locutions may be alike the work of the Spirit of Evil.* They may lead the soul astray. In the majority of instances they have no permanent value, and may lead to a form of spiritual pride. So the true-hearted mystic prays to be delivered from them. Such behaviour in no way implies rebellion against God. If these experiences be divine in origin, no human resistance will avail to check them. If they be the work not of a divine, but of an evil, spirit then resistance is the only course open to the Christian mystic. The advice of Gamaliel may well be followed: "If this work be of men it will come to nought. . . if it be of God ye cannot overthrow it."†

Is it possible to distinguish experiences of divine origin from those which are the work of the spirit of evil? "By their fruits ye shall know them"‡ is the one sure and unfailing test. Do these extraordinary experiences bring to a soul a sense of joy and peace? Do they turn the mind to God and stimulate a desire for prayer? Do they generate humility in the heart? Are they productive of a readiness for mortification and suffering? Is the spirit really profited and edified? If we can trace these and similar

* A similar fact is being realised more and more with regard to the phenomena of Spiritualism; and that not only by its most convinced opponents.

† Acts v. 38, 39. ‡ St. Matt. vii. 20.

results as a direct consequence of these experiences then we may thank God for them. If we find on the other hand that our experiences of visions, ecstacies or locutions lead only to spiritual pride, we may be sure that they are the work of the Enemy of souls.

In an orchard there are fruits of all kinds. All are fair to look upon, but some will poison, rather than nourish, the life of him who feeds upon them. In the mystic garden also are there many kinds of fruit. The mystic must needs be careful which of the fruits he eats. For while some will avail to nourish his spirit unto life eternal, others will poison and may ultimately kill the spiritual life within him.*

* For further and more detailed information from the Christian standpoint on the subject of ecstacies, visions and locutions, I would refer the reader to Scaramelli's *Il Direttorio Mistico* and Poulain's *Grâces d'Oraison*. Both are obtainable in English translations.

Chapter XVII

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF MYSTICISM

WE live in an age that worships the practical. To call a man a theorist, a philosopher, or a mystic, is equivalent to condemning him hopelessly in the eyes of the vast majority of his fellows. Unless his whole energy is devoted to the task of making headway in the race of life, unless his activities are almost entirely exercised in the outward sphere of his material existence, the world of to-day regards a man as entirely useless. Hence if we are to commend the mystical life to men and women of this generation we must not rest content with a treatment of it from the interior point of view. We must go on to consider its practical value in the active life of to-day.

The practical value of mysticism depends upon the realization of an important fact. The mystic is one who lives in two worlds of experience. He has his place in the sphere of active life and endeavour—the world of Becoming—and at the same time he takes his stand in the timeless world of Being. He has relationships with the things of sense, and at the same time

he lives and moves and has his being in that order which is apprehended not by the senses but by the spirit of man. From this two-fold experience the man of the world is led to condemn mysticism as that which tends to diffuseness of personality; but it is from this double existence that the mystical life derives its real value, and becomes a life of far greater significance and usefulness than those of its most persistent critics.

The mystic is one whose consciousness of all life is heightened intensely by his contact with Reality. He comes forth from this divine contact with his perceptions made more acute. He is, as we have tried to show already, more keenly alive to the inner significance of such spiritual facts as pain and beauty. His senses are braced and developed by his experiences of the life in the heavenly places. He becomes more sympathetic in two directions. Intensively his faculties feel more acutely the sufferings and joys, the hopes and disappointments of his fellows. He is more sensitive to the world's agony. He shares in it more fully, for he sees it working itself out in the Heart of God Himself. Moreover the range of his sympathies is widened; he learns to look upon life as a whole; to regard as a single unit the movement of life as it struggles towards the kingdom of God. It is the most noticeable characteristic of the true mystic, this deeper and wider sympathy with which he looks out upon the world in which he

lives. Surely such a characteristic has an immense and practical value in everyday life, and redeems mysticism once for all from the reproach of mere self-centred dreaming.

The mystic is one who lives above the mists of everyday life. He stands on the Mount of Transfiguration, and looks into the Face of God. He is not unduly cast down when he sees the clouds and thick darkness around him. He has seen the divine light and the sense of its brightness can never again leave him. He is freed for ever from all worry and anxiety. He is certain that " God's in His Heaven," and, therefore, in spite of all seeming to the contrary, he is content to believe that ultimately " all's right with the world." In the world of to-day more harm is being done by worry than it is at all possible to conceive. A man who never worries is the man most needed to-day. Such an one is the mystic and his value, from the practical point of view alone, is " beyond rubies."

Contact with Reality results in a new sense of values. The things that seem to the non-mystic of such tremendous importance, all the conventions of daily life and the habits of civilization, assume their true proportions in the eyes of the mystic. He sees them to be of use only in so far as they tend towards a right ordering of daily intercourse. He refuses to recognize them as being of the very stuff of life itself. He gives convention its true place as the servant of life; he refuses to acknowledge it as

his master. His life is free ; he is filled with an overwhelming sense of a vivid, pulsing Reality ; he knows that the smallest detail, as well as the greatest event, is of immense value, real and vital. This attitude towards life makes the mystic of great practical service in the world to-day. He looks upon the life of the senses as the outward visible sign of the intense underlying Reality. He stands over against the non-mystic, as one prepared for a great adventure, filled with the true spirit of romance. He is not a dreamer, but one who has learnt to live his life to the full.

The world cannot do without mystics. They have a contribution to make and an experience to share which belong to no one else. In every sphere of life, as a merchant or a scholar, as a soldier or an artizan, the mystic has a practical value of the highest order. His abiding contact with Reality gives the right orientation to all his activities. It supplies him not only with a motive, but with the power to achieve his purpose. His duty towards his God, his close touch with Divine Reality, lead him to a right attitude towards his fellowmen. What that attitude is is beautifully described by a modern writer* : " So here is your vocation set out : a vocation so various in its opportunities, that you can hardly fail to find something to do. It is your business to actualise within the world of time and space—perhaps by great endeavours

* Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, pp.157, 158.

in the field of heroic action, perhaps only by small ones in field and market, tram and tube, office and drawing room, in the perpetual give-and-take of the common life—that more real life, that holy creative energy, which this world manifests as a whole but indifferently. You shall work for mercy, order, beauty, significance: shall mend where you find things broken, make where you find the need. . . . The practical side of adoration consists in bringing the Real Presence from its hiddenness, and exhibiting it before the eyes of other men. . . . . It is the purpose for which you exist, and your contemplative consciousness, if you educate it, will make this fact clear to you. The teeming life of nature has yielded up to your loving attention many sacramental images of Reality: seen in the light of charity it is far more sacred and significant than you supposed. What about *your* life? Is that a theophany too? Do you proclaim by your existence the grandeur, the beauty, the intensity, the living wonder of that Eternal Reality within which, at this moment, you stand?"

In truth, it is no vague, unreal dreaming, this inner pilgrimage along the mystic way. The pilgrim is not less, but more, valuable by reason of his mystical outlook. His vocation is sealed in Heaven. but it must be wrought out in the workshop of everyday life. Of that working whereby the perfect life is slowly hammered out, no man can write, but of one fact there can be

no manner of doubt. The mystic emerges from his hidden experience better fitted than his fellows to take his part in the manifold activities of the world, and to face the varying experiences of everyday life.

Chapter XVIII

CONCLUSION

WE have tried to describe in simple words some of the stages in the mystic way along which the pilgrim soul must pass. It only remains to sum up in a few sentenecs the main substance of the foregoing pages.

The mystic pilgrimage begins normally with the experience of disillusionment. The soul comes to see the emptiness of that ideal of life which is held by the vast majority of men. The world can never satisfy the deepest longings of the human heart. There must be this satisfaction or the longings would hardly be there; and so the soul turns ultimately to God. This is conversion, and consists in a deliberate movement of the human will towards a true alignment with the will of God. In order properly to achieve this alignment the earthbound passions and desires need to be purged and cleansed of all defilement. The mystic submits to a rigid mortification of the demands of the body and a stern detachment of the mind from preoccupation with the things of sense. These experiences together form the Way of Purgation

whereby the soul is cleansed and made ready to respond to the divine call to go up higher.

The second stage in the mystic pilgrimage is the Way of Illumination, wherein the soul is fashioned anew after the divine Image. Knowledge about God is the usual, though not universal, preliminary to the knowledge of God. The mystic can acquire this knowledge by observation, by reading, and by study. It will awaken within him the keen desire to know God Himself and he will be led to explore the rich experiences of the life of prayer. It is here that the Way of Illumination merges into that of Union. Meditation (or mental prayer) gives place to contemplation, whereby ultimately the soul of the mystic is made at one with God.

Often enough before the end of the mystic way is reached the soul passes through the "divine dark" and the Enemy attacks the pilgrim in the deepest recesses of his being. Devotion loses its joy and becomes cold and distasteful. Doubts assail the mind and despair attacks the spirit. But the mystic is not without the weapons wherewith to turn aside the attacks of the Evil One. The Sacraments are alike the armour of defence and the sword of attack against which none of the powers of darkness can prevail.

The fruits of the mystic life are truly wonderful. A changed attitude towards pain, a new appreciation of beauty—the sister of pain,—a wondrous sweetness of the soul, and a dazzling

vision before the eyes, are often the treasures of the mystic. Above all, there comes a freshness of life and outlook which gives the lie to those people who confuse "mysticism" with "mistiness," and makes the mystic better fitted for the practical life of the world than the man whose eyes are never lifted towards the Everlasting Hills.

Let this book end as it began, with an appeal to all Christians, who have experienced the call, to set out upon this strange and wonderful journey. Mysticism is no unreal or vague dreaming. It is a life dominated by a purpose. As such it is a real life. Because that purpose is the highest, the life which struggles to achieve it is the best. Only the soul that seeks after God, that is prepared to risk everything that the world holds dear, shall find Him. For the condition and the promise stand as true to-day as they stood when they were made to the first followers of the Son of God: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and *he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*"*

* St. Matt. x. 37, 38, 39.

APPENDIX

A Short Bibliography of Books dealing with Mystical Theology.

W. James : *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Longmans, Green & Co.)

F. von Hugel : *The Mystical Element in Religion* 2 vols. (Dent.)

F. von Hugel : *Eternal Life* (T. & T. Clark.)

E. Underhill : *Mysticism* (Methuen.)

E. Underhill : *The Mystic Way* (Dent.)

E. Underhill : *Practical Mysticism* (Dent.)

E. Underhill : *The Essentials of Mysticism* (Dent.)

A. Chandler : *Ara Coeli* (Methuen.)

W. R. Inge : *Christian Mysticism* (Methuen.)

W. R. Inge : *Studies of English Mystics* (Murray.)

W. K. Fleming : *Mysticism in Christianity* (R. Scott.)

E. Herman : *The Meaning and Value of Mysticism* (James Clarke.)

W. M. Scott : *Aspects of Christian Mysticism* (Murray.)

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